THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE

JAZZ INFORMATION

VOL. I, No. 16 DECEMBER 29, 1939 TEN CENTS

PETE JOHNSON RECORDS FOR BLUE NOTE

Pete Johnson, Kansas City blues pianist and charter member of Cafe Society's Boogie Woogie Trio, recorded six 12-inch sides for Blue Note Records December 19.

On four of the sides, Johnson was accompanied by Ulysses Livingston, guitar, and Abe Bolar, bass. Livingston plays for Benny Carter, and Bolar is with Hot Lips Page. This trio waxed two slow blues and one fast and one slow boogie-woogie.

The other two sides recorded were piano solos, one a fast boogie-woogie and the other slow. None of these numbers have yet been given names. The first two sides are to be released in January.

W. C. HANDY MAKES RECORDS FOR U.S.

William Christopher Handy, veteran composer and blues writer, this week recorded four of his most famous tunes for United States Records.

The all-star colored band chosen to accompany Handy included Ed Hall on clarinet, Luis Russell, piano, and four men from Russell's band (Louis Armstrong's): J. C. Higginbotham, trombone; Bing Madison, tenor sax; Pop Foster, bass; and Sidney Catlett, drums.

On two of the numbers recorded, "St. Louis Blues" and "Beale Street Blues", Handy played cornet. On two others, "Loveless Love" and "Way Down South Where The Blues Begin", he merely sang his own lyrics.

COLLECTORS' ITEM

Even a brief and misplaced column, perhaps, will be better than none at all.

Orin Blackstone sends the personnel of Louis Dumaine's Jazzola Eight, which Harry Avery asked about in the December 15 issue. For Victor 20723, "Pretty Audrey -- Towa-bac-a-wa", and 20580, "Franklin Street Blues -- Red Onion Drag":

Louis Dumaine, cornet; Earl Humphrey, trombone; Willie Joseph, clarinet; Louis James, tenor sax; William Rouse, piano; Leonard Mitchell, banjo; Joe Howard, bass; and James Willigan, drums.

At the same time, March 7 1927, in New Orleans, Dumaine, Mitchell, Joseph, Willigan and Rouse played the accompaniment on another Victor record (number not given) for Ann Cook, vocalist: "Sweetest Black Man In Town--Mammy Cookie's Blues".

THE BANDWAGON

The Pirate's Den, in Greenwich Village, is jumping again. With Art Hodes and Earl Murphy working there, other musicians have been sitting in. Rod Cless and George Zack, both retired members of Muggsy Spanier's band, were there this week.

Frankie Newton continues at Kelly's Stable until January 4th with Tab Smith still on tenor, Eddie Dougherty on drums. Billie Holiday is featured vocalist there. Wingy Mannone opens January 5th.

Benny Carter's orchestra, touring, played a white dance at Cleveland Christmas night, and a colored one the 26th.

Teddy Bunn and the Spirits of Rhythm are continuing their eight-week run at Irving Wolfe's Rendezvous, Philadelphia. Two weeks ago they guested on WHAT's Wednesday night hot jazz program.

Rod Cless will lead the relief band at Nick's Tuesday night, with a combination including Art Hodes on piano and Earl Murphy, bass.

Georgie Auld's orchestra signed to make records for Varsity label. Count Basie having been transferred from Vocalion to Columbia label, Will Bradley will be next to undergo the 15-cent increase.

Ovie Alston plays the Century Theatre, New York City, through January 1st. Jack Jenney's orchestra, and Adrian Rollini's Trio, appear at the Flatbush Theatre this week. Lucky Millinder at the Carlton in Jamaica. Casa Loma at the Paramount. Bob Crosby at the Stanley in Pittsburgh.

Duke Ellington due at the Savoy next Sunday night (January 7). He opens at the Southland in Boston the following night.

New bands now rehearsing include Charlie Spivak, ex-Teagarden trumpeter, and Reilly-Farley, 52nd St. old-timers.

When Tony Spargo goes to the Hotel Astor December 31st, his Original Dixieland Jazz Band will remain at Nick's, playing under that name, with a substitute drummer.

In New York City: Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Zutty Singleton's quartet at Nick's; Joe Sullivan's band, Ida Cox, Big Bill, Sonny Terry, Boogie Woogie Trio, Hazel Scott at Cafe Society.

MUGGSY SPANIER QUITS TED LEWIS AFTER ONE WEEK IN CLEVELAND

Returns To New York To Find Bookings For His Own Band

CLEVELAND, Dec. 27. Muggsy Spanier is leaving Ted Lewis' orchestra after playing with him for a week.

Muggsy, jazz cornetist who left his Ragtime Band temporarily for a featured billing on Lewis' theater tour, had joined his former leader at the Palace here on Friday. His plan, as announced last week in Jazz Information, was to stay with Lewis for a few weeks, then return to his band in New York.

After playing the theater show two days, however, he gave Lewis notice, and plans to leave Cleveland after the last show Thursday night (December 28).

Spanier's sudden return to New York will find his band without bookings; but he expects to open soon at a club there if a vaudeville tour for the Ragtime Band is not arranged.

LUNCEFORD, KIRK, BASIE TO APOLLO

Jimmie Lunceford's orchestra begins a week at the 125th Street Apollo Theatre tonight (Friday).

Scheduled to follow Lunceford is Andy Kirk (opening January 9), with Count Basie the week thereafter.

LEONARD'S NEW YORK DEBUT SET

The first New York engagement of Harlan Leonard's Kansas City orchestra will be at Harlem's Golden Gate Ballroom. Leaving its home town for a tour under MCA management, the band will open at the new dance hall on February 10th, for a run of six weeks or more.

FROM SPIRITUALS TO SWING

The second annual "From Spirituals to Swing" concert took place Christmas Eve at Carnegie Hall. A complete review of the concert appears on page two of this issue.

CORRECTION

Joe Bushkin did not rejoin Joe Marsala's band last week. He has been playing solo piano at Kelly's Stable. Nat Jaffe is now with Marsala at the Fiesta.

FROM SPIRITUALS TO SWING

By J. D. Smith

The admonition of this report is to John Hammond, who managed the second of his annual "From Spirituals to Swing" programs on Sunday evening, December 24, 1939, for the Theatre Arts Committee, at Carnegie Hall. Hammond is reprimanded for doing too well. He is also charged with doing too well the first time.

Last year his Bessie Smith Memorial Concert was so full of spontaneity that those who returned this year saw and heard many of the same performers, but could not keep the ghost of the first rollicking session out of their minds.

According to the best designed methods of staging the show, last week's session was ideal. Sterling A. Brown, the excellent poet and Howard University teacher, had his program under control, and he kept the audience informed of each number.

Furthermore, the stage was set up, and the curtain was drawn in "two" on Carnegie's stage. The artists were assembled behind the brown curtain, the mike was set, and the spot man knew his cues. Joe Losey had staged everything. Everything was fixed.

And that was the hell of it. Nothing to be quarreled with in arrangements. That rowdy, vital hell-raising of last year just would not out of our minds. What was heard was good, and there were times when we were even sent--for short spurts. But we found ourselves approving of the "Spirituals to Swing" this year. Last year we left Carnegie delirious.

But to get down to the details.

The Kansas City Six was composed of five of Count Basie's men: Lester Young, tenor sax; Buck Clayton, trumpet; Freddie Green, guitar; Jo Jones, drums, and Walter Page, bass, with Charlie Christian, electric guitar. They opened with "Good Morning Blues", and some meanling cracked that it did not seem that the boys had gotten themselves awake. That was not fair. "Paging The Devil" followed, and Charlie riffed right into it. "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" saved the inning. It was quite refined.

Sped from the exuberance of a Christmas Eve in Harlem's Apollo Theatre, Sister Tharpe and her guitar, with Cab Calloway's Bennie Paine at the piano, came on as though she meant to Do Something About It. Her songs were religious but her jazz was torrid. "The Oldest Sheep Knows the Road" and "Mary and the Baby--Sweet Lamb" convinced the audience that more of Sister Tharpe had to be heard. Her "Rock Me" (In His Bosom) and "That's All" had to suffice. Dangerously close to commercialism a la Cotton Club, nevertheless Sister Tharpe delivered goods with the hot label.

The Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet of Charlotte, N.C., were confronted with the spook of the Mitchell Christian Singers of 1938's affair. Those four slow-moving, unaffected serious men were replaced by the dapper, radio-wise Willie Johnson, first bass; Harry Owens, first tenor; William Langford, second tenor; and Arlandus Wilson, second bass.

The Golden Gates, who were heard twice, in each half of the program, displayed two styles. They had a narrative, "jumpy" recitative style with the background harmony of the three singers setting up the narrator, and they sang a doleful, wailing spiritual. "David" and "Noah" were examples of this, and these were undeniably fine. So were "I'm On My Way" (To the Kingdom), and "Ain't Got M' Travelin' Shoes". Narrative, humor and lift were in these. The doleful harmonics of "Oh What A Time" and "Am I Born To Die" got us on the downbeat, however. (This might have been our mood.) "Gospel Train" reminded us of how Juanita Hall's choir does the song, but not as well as her group.

Big Bill, or William Broonzy, the folk singer with his guitar, was still the tall, loose-jointed superb Big Bill. "I Had A Dream" was its ironic self, and his "Done Got Wise" expressed his disapproval of letting a woman make a fool of a man. "Louise, Louise" (That Sweetest Gal) showed that Bill was not one whit affected by the setting. Sterling Brown asked a bit of forbearance on the part of the audience, but Bill did not need it. He had what he had to say, and said it.

The Boogie Woogie piano players and Joe Turner, blues singer, returned. It was fine to see that Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson and Meade Lux Lewis have not allowed their deserved prosperity to take anything away from their playing. The three of them got right into "Jumpin' the Blues" and "Boogie Woogie Stomp". Ammons took a solo with facility, and Pete Johnson and Joe Turner did "Low Down Dog" and "Roll 'Em Pete", Johnson always industriously and speedily giving his best.

But Meade Lux's "Honky Tonk Train" seemed the most solid. Boogie-Woogie is admirably suited for his portrayal of the theme with authentic foundational conviction.

Benny Goodman's Sextet presented the publicized "King" and his clarinet; Charlie Christian, electric guitar; Fletcher Henderson, piano; Lionel Hampton, vibraphone; Artie Bernstein, bass; and Nick Fatool, drums.

"Flyin' Home" did not quite get there, and "Memories of You" was little warmer. The regal clarinet seemed too much a sceptre. But in "I Got Rhythm" Lionel decided that he was "gone" and took over; won in a walk. Charlie Christian continued the rebellion in "Honeysuckle Rose", and Fletcher picked him up. Even the King was sent by this time. "Stompin' at the Savoy" saw him firmly implanted on the throne again, however; but the uprising was hell while it lasted.

The discrimination and artistry of James P. Johnson's "Mule Walk", and a new composition, "Blueberry Wine", were refreshing. The Old Master still rules at the keyboard and is not one bit excited about it. He is so sure he is not even troubled.

Sentimental highspot, and welcome returner this year, Saunders "Sonny" Terry, blind harmonica player and singer, could please us interminably with "The Fox Hunt". "Mountain Blues" and an innovation, "New John Henry", the latter done with Bull City Red at the washboard, gave Sonny the evening for the audience's satisfaction. We personally are weak for those houn' dog woofings of Terry's.

It seems to us that Ida Cox, truly a traditional blues singer, suffered from poor billing. She followed the quartet, Johnson and Terry. She sang "Four-Day Creep", "Low Down Dirty Shame" and "Hard, Hard Oh Lord" (To Love Another Woman's Man), completely to our approval. James P. Johnson played fine piano for her, and she was also accompanied by an aggregation of instrumentalists including Dickie Wells, trombone; Jo Jones, drums; Shad Collins, trumpet; Buddy Tate, tenor sax; Walter Page, bass.

A warmer-upper for the frankness of the blues intimacies might have been a better program setting for

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JAZZ INFORMATION

JAZZ INFORMATION is published weekly throughout the year at Suite 900, 505 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. Telephone, MUrray Hill 2-3755. Single copy, ten cents; four week trial twenty-five cents. Annual subscription $3.00, six months $1.50, four months $1.00. Life subscription $10.00.

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NEW RECORDS

IDA COX and her All Star Band (Vo 05258) Pink Slip Blues -- Take Him Off My Mind. Ida Cox, blues vocal; Hot Lips Page, trumpet; J. C. Higginbotham, trombone; Edmund Hall, clarinet; Fletcher Henderson, piano; Charlie Christian, guitar; Artie Bernstein, bass; Lionel Hampton, drums.

Ida Cox is an extraordinary blues singer, with a powerful voice, excellent intonation and phrasing, and a fine natural sense of the blues tradition. Her first record in the swing era is, nevertheless, a little disappointing, because it lacks what advance publicity had led us to expect -- the sweeping genius of a Bessie Smith. Probably her first recording date in so many years was somewhat difficult, and there may well be better sides to come.

These two are good, however; especially the second. One of their weaknesses is the rather tricky supporting band, which is not entirely satisfactory. The rhythm section particularly seems not at home in the blues; Fletcher Henderson, who used to turn in some of the nicest blues accompaniments, is hardly heard at all. Ed Hall, as always, is all there, playing beautiful clarinet; Higgy is good, if a bit dramatic, and Lips surpasses himself. As a whole, though, the band misses on two counts, drive and spontaneity, which might have encouraged Miss Cox to let go and give out the overwhelming blues she is said to be capable of.

JESS STACY and his Orchestra (Varsity 8132) Clarinet Blues--I Can't Believe That You're In Love With Me. Billy Butterfield, trumpet; Les Jenkins, trombone; Irving Fazola, clarinet; Eddie Miller, tenor sax; Jess Stacy, piano; Sid Weiss, bass; Don Carter, drums.

Although this session could have been much better, it demonstrated how well Bob Crosby's best men can play when freed from the restrictions of their formula. "Clarinet Blues" is a pretty, very "white" blues, made very attractive by the restraint and taste of almost all concerned. It consists simply of solos by clarinet (two choruses), tenor sax, and piano, with a concluding ensemble chorus; all played in appropriately slow tempo. Fazola's clarinet is as fine as ever, and Eddie Miller's tenor chorus is an exceptional example of his simple style and his talent for improvisation by fluent, small changes in line. Stacy plays very imaginatively behind the soloists, and in his beautiful solo again proves his superb touch and phrasing, and his great harmonic ability. The ensemble chorus is less good than the solos, however; and Don Carter's cymbal playing became very annoying, to our ears at least, behind the piano solo.

"I Can't Believe" is played fast and lively. Butterfield uses a mute with very good effects, Stacy plays a rather undistinguished solo, and Eddie Miller is his usual self in fromt of the choired ensemble.

COUNT BASIE'S Orchestra (Co 35321) I Left My Baby -- Riff Interlude. Ed Lewis, Buck Clayton, Shad Collins, Harry Edison, trumpets; Benny Morton, Dickie Wells, Dan Minor, trombones; Earl Warren, Jack Washington, Lester Young, Buddy Tate, saxes; Count Basie, piano; Freddie Green, guitar; Walter Page, bass; Jo Jones, drums.

The first side begins, promisingly, with a slow, heavy Ellington touch reminiscent of the Count's "Good Morning Blues"; and James Rushing sings a grand, restrained blues vocal (almost dirge tempo), against Lester Young's best obbligato. After the vocal the arrangement falls sadly into the usual big noise from Kansas City, spoiling a very likely side. The reverse is a fast Basie stomp, with noteworthy solos by Young and Buck Clayton.

BENNY GOODMAN'S SEXTET (Co 35320) Soft Winds--Memories Of You. Benny Goodman, clarinet; Lionel Hampton, vibraphone; Fletcher Henderson, piano; Charlie Christian, guitar; Artie Bernstein, bass; Nick Fatool, drums.

A great improvement on the sextet's first record, "Soft Winds" picks up some of the good effects used in the Goodman Quintet version of "Pick-A-Rib", repeating them in pleasant but considerably less exciting form. The coupling is a good job, in the sweet style established by other Goodman "chamber" groups for popular standards.

BENNY GOODMAN'S Orchestra (Co 35-319) Honeysuckle Rose--Spring Song. Personnel for first side: Ziggy Elman, Johnny Martel, Corky Cornelius, trumpets; Vernon Brown, Red Ballard, trombones; Benny Goodman, clarinet; Toots Mondello, Jerry Jerome, Buff Estes, Clarence Bassey, saxes; Nick Fatool, drums; Fletcher Henderson, piano; Charlie Christian, guitar; Artie Bernstein, bass. Spring Song has Chris Griffin in place of Martel, Arnold Covarrubias in place of Christian, and Bruce Squires, 3rd trombone.

Benny Goodman's first recording of "Honeysuckle Rose" is billed as one of the finest discs he's ever made. This is undoubtedly an exaggeration. The tune is more than a little trite, and in spite of the Fletcher Henderson arrangement, Goodman's treatment is not inspiring. As always, the section playing of the band is very smooth. Charlie Christian's guitar solo is quite pleasant.

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"I FOUND A NEW PAPER!"

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--- H. L., Long Beach, L. I.

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NEW RECORDS

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The Spring Song (Mendelssohn's) is also arranged by Fletcher Henderson; but it is an exaggeration, again, to call the result a "Jazz Masterwork". The attempt to remake a familiar popular theme for swing by treating its melody with jumpy phrasing doesn't usually come out very well. Benny's clarinet solo is a relief, coming as it does after a weirdly intoned sax chorus.

ALIX COMBELLE, The Sheik Of Araby; HOT CLUB OF FRANCE QUINTETTE, Your Sweet Smile (Royale 1807). Personnel for first side only: Alix Combelle, tenor and clarinet; Stephane Grappelly, piano; Django Reinhardt, Pierre Ferret, Joseph Reinhardt, guitars; Louis Vola, bass. Second side: Grappelly, violin; Django Reinhardt, Joseph Reinhardt, Roger Chaput, guitars; Louis Vola, bass.

Two reissues of Ultraphone masters made in Paris, 1935. Combelle, tenor sax star of the French Hot Club and a competent follower of Hawkins, struggles vainly against the pathetic rhythm section, and unfortunately also plays clarinet witnout having enough command of the instrument. The coupling (originally issued as "Ton Doux Sourire") is commercial.

DUKE ELLINGTON (Co 35322) Blues -- Plucked Again. Duke Ellington, piano; Jimmy Blanton, bass.

There has always been some tendency to sneeze at Duke Ellington's abilities as a piano soloist. Even those who praise him most highly as arranger, composer and leader speak of him as only a fair pianist. But in our opinion, although he may be deficient in pure swing, he shows an increasing ability to apply to the piano musical ideas of the same order that he uses orchestrally. Not improvising, perhaps, but working out a solo as carefully as he does an arrangement, he has created piano music, on occasion, as fascinating as his best band compositions.

That was merely a remark we've been storing up; for his talents don't get much display on this new disc. Not piano solos but piano and bass duets, these sides display the virtuoso technique and tone of the Duke's new bass player to good advantage; but the piano is subordinated, and the two don't get together well enough to produce really interesting music.

JACK TEAGARDEN'S Orchestra (Co 35-323) Beale Street Blues — Swingin' On The Teagarden Gate. Karl Garvin, Frank Ryerson, Lee Castaldo, trumpets; Eddie Dudley, Mark Bennett, Joe Gutierrez, Jack Teagarden, trombones; Ernie Caceres, Clint Garvin, Johnny Van Eps, Art St. John, Hub Lytle, saxes; Jack Rusin, piano; Allan Reuss, guitar; Bonnie Pottle, bass; Dave Tough, drums.

Another disappointing disc shows the Teagarden outfit compromising unsuccessfully between the loose, relaxed style which would display Mr. T to best advantage, and hard-and-fast swing style. The old Goodman-Teagarden "Beale Street" was infinitely better. The coupling is a neatly assembled collection of old riffs. Except for the opening trumpet of "Beale Street" (Castaldo?) and the tenor on "Gate", both of which have good and bad points, the only interesting solos are Teagarden's, trombone and vocal. Not inspired, but relaxed and confident as ever.

SEXTET OF THE RHYTHM CLUB OF LONDON (BB 10529) Mighty Like The Blues -- Calling All Bars. Danny Polo, clarinet; Pete Brown, alto sax; Hazel Scott, piano; Albert Harris, guitar; Pete Barry, bass; Arthur Herbert, drums.

This very peculiar combination was assembled by Leonard Feather, who chose three ex-Ambrose men and three West Indian colored musicians to record his own tunes. The first side makes a pleasant enough pop, with solos by Pete Brown, our favorite jive alto, and Polo, whose clarinet is very competent, as well as a fair vocal by Miss Scott. The reverse is very poor: built out of worthless musical material, it has a ridiculous piano solo and some extremely annoying drumming.

EARL HINES' Orchestra (BB 10531) Riff Medley -- X Y Z. The Father's band is still powerful, interesting and a little short of satisfying. The second side rides pretty well, rather in the Basie fashion (influence also shown by Bud Johnson's tenor). A very short piano passage manages to be pretty exciting.

CHARLIE BARNET'S Orchestra (BB 10-530) Ogoun Badagris --- The Right Idea. The first side, which is subtitled "Voodoo War God", is in the Ellington groove again; and suffers, as the Duke's own music sometimes does, from an excess of undigested material. The other side is Barnet in the Basie mood, the soloists changing their styles to match.

BIG BILL (Vo 05259) My Last Goodbye To You — Just A Dream No. 2. Big Bill, one of Vocalion's finest race artists, is almost at his best in these two sides, and as always his accompaniment features an amazingly solid, colorful rhythm section in which a highly talented pianist plays some very peculiar blues. "Just A Dream" is concerned, like the blues Bill sang at Carnegie, with the pleasant things that happen only in his dreams.

We regret that delays caused by the holiday season have prevented us from maintaining our complete review of all the new hot records. By next week we expect to cover all current releases.

FROM SPIRITUALS TO SWING

(Continued from Page 2)

Miss Cox. She seemed to feel the lack of close communication with her audience. (Some family spirits were seen to hustle the junior members out of the joint and to bed.) Nothing against Miss Cox or her singing; we thought she could have been better placed. We do not think that this lady should be compelled to pull her punches.

The theme music of Count Basie was heard, and then the curtain disclosed the maestro and his assemblage. "If I Could Be With You" offered some fine things, including a vocal by Helen Humes. James Rushing's "Baby, Don't Tell On Me" took everyone, however. He had a bit of a struggle with volume from the band, but he established the fact that it was still okay to tap the foot and waggle the head when correctly and sufficiently sent. James had no recital-at-the-studio air about him. (We loved it, James.)

By the time the jam session was scheduled the rent man was evidently telling the folk that rug-cutting in Carnegie after midnight is strictly nix. At any rate the bull fiddlers were changing beasts in midstream, Bernstein doing nicely after the acrobatics, and it was exciting to see if the stagehand could get the AC-DC guitar hooked up in time for Charlie Christian to take his riffs.

Joe Sullivan, Pete Johnson and Count alternated at the piano, but Hampton missed the train, and his turn at the drums. Harry Edison expressed himself and Lester Young testified. But the jam session was rushed -- as Mr. Hammond had explained and apologized to the audience -- through necessity. The result could not help being confused and short.

There are the details, and we should add that they total up to a successful affair for the musicians, for TAC, for Hammond and his staff, and for those who crowded Carnegie to standing-room capacity.

It cannot be denied that these "Spirituals to Swing" concerts should be annual events. The very fact that they help present performers to new listeners; the point that they advocate the mixed band; the fact that they are becoming nationally and internationally famous:-- these establish them, and they serve worthy causes. We want to attend 1940's.

We missed, however, Sidney Bechet. We should have liked to hear Zutty Singleton's combination, for instance. We should love to hear the Beetle and his hunger piano, out of James P. Johnson by Parlor-Social. We should welcome back the Mitchell Christian Singers, and some more new faces with the old.